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TAGS: MARR NATO PREL PL

SUBJECT: ADDRESSING POLISH DISAPPOINTMENT OVER GAGOR'S NATO
CMC LOSS

REF: WARSAW 02213

Classified By: CDA Kenneth M. Hillas for reasons 1.4(b) and (d).

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: Although reactions vary in intensity, Poland's foreign and security affairs community is clearly disappointed over the November 14 defeat of Polish Chief of the General Staff Gen. Franciszek in his bid to become Chairman of the NATO Military Committee (CMC). A significant minority in Poland sees Gagor's loss as further evidence that NATO partners are undervaluing Poland's importance as an ally. Given the key U.S. goals of continued Polish participation in Afghanistan and Iraq and conclusion of successful Missile Defense negotiations (ref A), it is critical that we engage quickly with the newly named Polish government to avoid any misconceptions of U.S. neglect. A congratulatory phone call from SECDEF to incoming DefMin Bogdan Klich along with an invitation for Klich to visit Washington would effectively demonstrate our appreciation for Polish partnership and cooperation. END SUMMARY

Public Messages Polite, Personal Messages Blunt

¶2. (C) Polish officials have been gracious in public. Gagor himself denied that the CMC vote constituted any sort of insult and urged that Poland redouble its active participation in NATO. Polish Ambassador to NATO Boguslaw Winid said, "we did our best" and can leave "with our heads up." As might be expected, outgoing DefMin Aleksander Szczyglo, blamed the withdraw-from-Iraq policy of the recently victorious Civic Platform (PO) for souring NATO on Poland.

¶3. (C) In private, influential Polish personalities have communicated their dismay over Gagor's defeat directly to Embiffs. Former MFA Americas Director Henryk Szlajfer complained at a November 14 Embassy reception that, "We've been in NATO for 10 years (sic) and still no new member state has held that post." On the other hand, the head of an influential think tank and several journalists, after quizzing Polcouns over U.S. support for Gagor, then laid the blame squarely on the shoulders of the weak diplomacy of the outgoing government and the damage it has done to Poland's image.

Soul Searching in the Press Turns Ugly

¶4. (C) The Polish press similarly expressed everything from confusion to disappointment to calls for revision of Polish foreign policy. Leading daily *Gazeta Wyborcza* blamed the inept foreign policy of Poland's outgoing government for

Gagor's defeat. Several other sources reported or implied that the U.S. had supported the Italian candidate, Admiral Giampaolo Di Paola. Daily *Rzeczpospolita* suggested that Italian-American ties and U.S. bases in Sicily trumped majority support for Gagor. Even those who reported U.S. support for Gagor still expressed dismay, reflecting a lingering sense that decisions like this one cannot happen at NATO without U.S. approval. One Warsaw radio broadcast said, "We can no longer wait for U.S. appreciation." The leftist daily *Trybuna* (circulation 20,000) ran a scathing commentary that stated, "The defeat of General Gagor is the second (after visas) flagrant example that what the Americans can offer Poland are only platitudes about Kosciuszko, Pulaski, Walesa and John Paul II...Perhaps it is a good opportunity to redefine our principle goals in Poland's foreign policy."

Impact on U.S.-Polish Cooperation

¶ 15. (C) Poland's newly elected government is on the verge of defining its foreign policy program. Although the new government has stated its desire to withdraw its 900 troops from Iraq before the end of 2008 (ref A), we could still maximize their remaining participation via the NATO Training Mission in Iraq (NTM-I). The outgoing Government had no plans to scale down its 1,200 man commitment in Afghanistan, but we cannot take Poland's continued engagement for granted. Negotiations to base 10 ground-based interceptors in Poland as part of the Ballistic Missile Defense System are ongoing, though the new government will require some time to read in as the previous government did not keep opposition parties informed on the state of negotiations.

¶ 16. (C) COMMENT: The disappointment over Gagor need not spill over into the bilateral relationship, if properly managed. Part of that should include early engagement of the new Defense Minister Bogdan Klich. We strongly recommend that SecDef place a congratulatory call soon after Klich's November 16 swearing in, to be followed up by an invitation for an early visit by Klich to Washington. Such proactive engagement would earn both positive press and good will with the new government. It will also lay a good foundation for the year ahead in which we will ask Poland to continue its support for foreign deployments despite broad public opposition. END COMMENT.

HILLAS